DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 214 SO 014 175

AUTHOR Fraenkel, Jack R.
TITLE Is There a Place for the Nonrational in Social Studies Education?
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; Affective Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Activities; Moral Development; *Social Studies; Social Values; Teaching Methods; *Values Education

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some reasons why feelings are important to study as a part of K-12 social studies and to suggest a few ways this might be done. Reasons why feelings should be taught include the following. Knowledge of how people feel in various situations, as well as knowledge of the forces and factors which bring such feelings about, can help students understand the real world and how it works. If we want to help students understand the actions, beliefs, and values of people as fully as they can, we need to help them understand as much as possible about what causes people to act as they do, believe what they do, and hold the values they do. In addition, an understanding of how people feel in different types of situations is also crucial to moral development. Specific objectives which the explicit study of feelings can help social studies teachers attain are listed. The second part of the paper describes and provides examples of two types of activities which will help students study the feelings of people. First students should be involved in various types of experiences likely to produce an emotional reaction on their part. This experience should be followed up by discussions with them as to how they felt during and after participating in the experience. For example, the students might visit a nursing home and talk with the residents. The second type of activity would engage students in discussions of what they would do in various sorts of emotion-laden situations, how they think other people placed in such situations might feel, and what they think might be the possible consequences of various actions on other people. (RM)

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IS THERE A PLACE FOR THE NONRATIONAL IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION?

Jack R. Fraenkel
San Francisco State University

[Paper prepared for presentation at the 1982 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, March 19-23, 1982].

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IS THERE A PLACE FOR THE NONRATIONAL IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION?

Jack R. Fraenkel
San Francisco State University

A frequently expressed aim of social studies education is to help students become more critical, that is, rational, thinkers. As used here, the term "rational" means not only to reason logically oneself, but also to seek out and evaluate the reasons other people have for their beliefs. Workshops for teachers and professional conferences, not to mention articles and books devoted to this topic continue to proliferate (e.g., Phillips, 1974; Scriven, 1976; Belth, 1977; Hudgins, 1977; Beyer, 1979). The development of thinking is usually found in the lists of objectives prepared by school districts and by many social studies teachers. Indeed, the professional organization of social studies teachers, the National Council for the Social Studies, lists "the varied processes of thinking" as one of four main objectives which all social studies programs should seek to foster (NCSS, 1979, p. 263).

The development of a student's rational capabilities appears, in fact, to be a "given" for most (if not all) educators. It would be a rare teacher, I think, who would say that he or she does not try to promote thinking on the part of his or her students (whether, or how well, he or she actually does this, of course, is another matter). One never sees "the development of thinking" mentioned in the literature as something teachers should try to avoid, or strive not to attain.

Some educators have argued, however, that this preoccupation among their colleagues with the development of thinking tends to ignore (or at least downplay) the fact that there are many nonrational

influences on behavior, and that such nonrational influences not only play a big part in determining what a student learns, and how well he or she learns it, but also that such influences are worthy of study themselves (e.g., Jones, 1968; Greenberg, 1969; Borton, 1970; Harmin, 1976; Miller, 1976; Wallen, 1977; Castillo, 1978).

Very little of this argument, however, has been directed specifically toward social studies educators. There are few articles on the subject of non-rational influences to be found in the professional literature directed toward social studies teachers, nor is the subject mentioned in the great majority of social studies methods textbooks (e.g., the 1981 NSSE Yearbook on the social studies contains not a single reference to the subject of non-rational influences on behavior. For an exception to the general trend, see Fraenkel, 1980). This is somewhat surprising, for one would think that of all the subjects studied in schools, the social studies would, in particular, be especially suited to the study of such influences.

By "nonrational"influences on behavior, I am referring here essentially to what we call "feelings," that is, any of the pleasant or unpleasant subjective reactions which people may have to a particular situation, and which (usually) are not based on nor associated with reasoning. I shall use the term "feelings" instead of "nonrational influences" throughout the remainder of this paper, therefore. Much of what I shall have to say, however, would also apply to other nonrational influences, such as attitudes, intuitions, moods, dispositions, opinions, etc.

The intent of this paper, therefore, is to suggest some reasons why feelings are important to study as a part of social education, and suggest a few ways as to how this might be done.

The Importance of Studying Feelings as a Part of Social Studies Education

First of all, not only do the disciplines which provide much of the subject matter of the social studies focus in large part on the behavior of people -- their actions, decisions, ideas, etc., but also they study the forces and factors in the world which bring about such behavior. It is a fact that the feelings of people often play a part [and sometimes a very large part] in determining what their behavior is. Furthermore, one of these disciplines, psychology, has the study of feelings as one of its main concerns.

Secondly, since our nation began, the school has been viewed as the primary social institution charged with transmitting knowledge to the young. To help students acquire worthwhile and dependable knowledge has always been a major goal of social studies [indeed, of general] education. The NCSS Curriculum Guidelines state most specifically that "knowledge about the real world and knowledge about the worthiness of personal and social judgments" are basic objectives of social studies instruction [1979, p. 262]. Furhtermore, these Guidelines state that an important source of such knowledge "may be the interests and values that students hold about themselves and their society" [1979, p. 263].

Knowledge of how people feel in various situations, as well as the forces and factors which bring such feelings about, can help students understand this "real world," and how it works, since much of what goes on there is influenced considerably by the feelings which

people have, and how they display these feelings. If we want to help students understand the actions, beliefs, values, etc. of people as fully as they can, we need to help them understand as much as possible about what causes people to act as they do, believe what they do, hold the values they do, etc. Helping students to learn more about not only their own feelings, but also the feelings of others, and what factors contribute to the having of various feelings, can contribute to such understanding.

In addition, an understanding of how people feel in different types of situations is also crucial to moral development. One attribute of a morally mature individual is an ability to put him- or herself "in another person's shoes" (Wilson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1971; McPhail, 1972; Boyce and Jensen, 1978). It is argued by many philosophers and others interested in values education (of which moral development is a part) that an individual is more likely to take the needs and interests of others into account if he or she can see things from the other person's point of view (Peters, 1967; McPhail, 1972; Fraenkel, 1977). Being able to see things from another person's point of view requires that a person have some idea of how the other person feels; conversely, a person is probably not going to want to see (or even to be interested in seeing) things from another person's point of view if he or she does not care (has no feelings about) that that person's point of view is (Peters, 1967; Wilson, 1972; Wallen, 1977).

The explicit study of feelings in elementary and secondary schools, therefore, could help teachers attain several objectives. In particular, I would hypothesize that such study would contribute to an increased awareness and understanding on the part of students of:

. various types of situations in which certain types of feelings are likely to occur;

. how people feel when placed in various kinds of situations;

. the fact that different kinds of feelings may exist in the same situation;

. reasons why people have certain feelings (i.e., possible factors likely to generate certain kinds of feelings);

. how the expectations of others contribute to particular kinds of feelings;

. how feelings and values are related,

as well as an increased willingness and ability on their part to:

. recognize other people's feelings;

. recognize conflicts which arise due to differences in feelings;

. see things from another person's point of view;

. consider the possible effects of one's actions on the feelings of other people;

. predict how people are likely to feel, and perhaps react in certain types of situations.

The above hypotheses rest on several assumptions:

1) that an increased awareness of and sensitivity to how others feel is worth trying to attain;

2) that the more viewpoints a person understands, the greater his or her sensitivity to others is likely to be;

3) that awareness and sensitivity cannot be taught directly, but develop out of certain types of emotional and intellectual experiences. Such experiences can be provided for in schools, however.

4) that the role of teachers is not to judge the feelings of their students, but rather to help students understand and clarify

their own and others' feelings. The teacher should be prepared to state and explain his or her own feelings about something, however, if asked to do so);

5) that helping students in school to consider hypothetical situations [and real-life] from the viewpoint of others will make them more likely to consider the feelings of other people with whom they come in contact outside of school.

Ways to Study the Feelings of People

There are, no doubt, many ways to encourage students to explore feelings in schools. In this paper, however, I would like to discuss two types of activities that I think are particularly likely to attain many of the objectives mentioned earlier in the paper. These activities include: (1) involving students in various types of experiences likely to produce an emotional reaction on their part (followed up by discussions with them as to how they felt during and after participating in the experiences); and (2) engaging students in discussions of (a) what they would do in various sorts of emotion-laden situations; (b) how they think other people placed in such situations might feel; and (c) what they think might be the possible consequences of various actions on other people. The sorts of experiences I have in mind can either be participated in directly by means of field trips or extracurricular activities, or vicariously through films, stories, or roleplaying, and do not need any kind of elaborate preparation or buildup ahead of time. The kinds of situations I envisage being discussed are ones in which one person acts toward another in a way (or ways) likely to produce certain feelings in the latter; in which two or more viewpoints are expressed on an issue; or in which the action(s) of a person may have an effect on

one or more others. Let me give some examples.

Examples of Experiences in Which Students Might Be Involved

- Visiting an old folks home and talking with the residents;
- Wearing a blindfold for twenty minutes;
- Playing a game with a young child;
- Kissing someone whom one cares about;
- Visiting a friend in a hospital;
- Spending a day in a wheelchair;
- Watching a powerful film;
- Playing with a kitten or a puppy;
- Listening to Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" played by a band;
- Dancing;
- Running a mile;
- Smiling at another person.

What all of the above experiences have in common, I think, is that they are highly likely to engender some sort of emotional response on the part of students, and they are the kinds of experiences in which most of us participate, or have seen others participate, rather frequently in our daily lives. They generate feelings in people -- it is very hard, I believe, not to be emotionally affected, in some way or another, by such experiences. Discussion with, and sharing by, students of how they feel during, or felt after, their participation in such experiences can help them be more aware of their own and others' feelings, and (perhaps) become more accepting of the fact that people often feel differently about things than they do.

Examples of Situations Which Might Be Discussed

(a) Those where students are asked to consider what they would do were they in such a situation, e.g.,

- being ignored by another person to whom one is attracted;

. being picked on frequently by someone;

. observing something happening to one's best friend which causes him or her to suffer;

. believing that another student is telling lies about one;

. having a friend stick up for one in an argument;

. being ignored by others at a social gathering;

. having one's friends or parents criticized by others in one's presence;

. being praised for one's activities on the athletic field or in the classroom;

. having another person push past in a line at a restaurant, and then be served first;

. having a friend borrow one's things without asking.

(b) Those where students are asked to consider the possible consequences of certain actions, as when a person:

. does not return something borrowed from a friend;

. continually makes caustic remarks about others;

. takes a job he or she does not like for the money involved;

. always keeps a promise;

. sleeps around;

. always believes what he or she is told by others;

. judges someone by his or her looks;

. is always on time.

(c) Those where students are asked to put themselves in another person's shoes, to try and see things from that person's perspective, as, e.g., when:

. a boy becomes moody and distant when his girl friend gets better grades in school and is offered a scholarship to a good university;

. a 70-year-old complains to her 15-year-old granddaughter that the granddaughter plays rock music on her radio much too loudly;

. a man complains to his neighbor about the continuous barking of the neighbor's dog;

. a father objects to the engagement of his daughter to a man of a different religious faith;

. a person turns down a position with a large firm at good pay because she is afraid of speaking in public, which the position requires;

. a man refuses to exchange a present because he stammers badly.

What all of these situations [or others like them] have in common is that, again, people's feelings are likely to be involved. By having students discuss what they would do, or what consequences might ensue from a course of action, or what they think another person would say or do or think, not only might they become more aware and accepting of the needs and concerns of others, and perhaps more able to see things from another's point of view, and to take that point of view into account, in their daily life.

One note of caution: the use of any <u>particular</u> experience or situation as a teaching vehicle always would depend on the level of sophistication of the students to be involved, a matter of judgment by the teacher in terms of what he or she thinks is or is not appropriate to his or her students' needs and maturaltional level.

<u>A Brief Note About the Relationship Between Feelings and Values</u>

Feelings and values are not the same, although they are most certainly intertwined. Values are, to my way of thinking, <u>ideas</u> -- ideas about what is worthwhile in life, i.e., worth having, worth doing, or worth trying to attain. Hence in this respect they are

cognitive in nature. But they also have an affective component. People care a great deal about their values, they have strong feelings toward them. It would be rather surprising to hear someone remark that they valued something a great deal, but they did not care for it very much. (This is not to say that people cannot like things they do not value, or that have little value to them.)

The development of an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the feelings of others, therefore, is an important part of values education. If we wish to help students become more mature morally, then we need to help them learn how to take the viewpoints of others into account. It is important for students to be sensitive to, and able to understand, the viewpoints of others if they are to assess the worth of alternative decisions, positions, policies, etc., and students are very unlikely to want to take another's viewpoint into account if they do not even care about finding out what that viewpoint is.

A final comment. Hand in glove with all that has been said above is the necessity for teachers to realize that they must continuously take the feelings of their students into account with regard to what goes on in the classroom. Asking students for continual feedback in terms of how the students feel about what the teacher is doing (and then taking that feedback into account) can go a long way toward helping students learn what the teacher is trying to teach.

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